

Sea Cliff Inn
31 Cliff Road
Nantucket
Nantucket County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-967

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10-NANT
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

SEA CLIFF INN

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Location: 31 Cliff Road (on north side of Cliff Road approximately 1100 feet from corner of Easton Avenue, on a bluff overlooking bathing beaches and entrance to harbor), Nantucket, Massachusetts. Latitude: 41° 17' 22" N. Longitude: 70° 06' 18"W.

Present Owner: Sherburne Associates

Present Occupant: Sea Cliff Inn

Present Use: As a summer hotel.

Brief Statement of Significance: A typical late nineteenth century beach resort hotel, one of the largest in Nantucket.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1880 -- R. Gardner Chase bought the property from Obed G. Coffin, mariner, the deed reading, "dwelling-house and all other buildings thereon, being the premises now occupied by me as a residence."
- 1886 -- Charles H. Robinson bought from R. Cardner Chase.
- 1887 -- Charlotte W. Pettee given bond for deed by Charles H. Robinson.
- 1891 -- Charlotte W. Pettee bought from Charles H. Robinson for \$13,500 the property "formerly known as the Obed Coffin Place, whereon now stands the so-called 'Sea Cliff Inn'".
- 1902 -- Nantucket Company, "a corporation incorporated and established under the laws of Rhode Island, having a place of business in Providence", bought the premises from the Estate of Charlotte W. Pettee, for \$56,750.
- 1907 -- Town of Nantucket took over the Nantucket Company and the same year deeded to James H. Hurley and the Union Trust Company.
- 1907 -- William D. Carpenter and Clifford Folger for the Sea Cliff Inn Company purchased the property.

- 1933 -- Nantucket Institution for Savings took over.
- 1936 -- John O. Wilson, under name of Nantucket Hotels Inc. bought the property.
- 1938 -- Nantucket Institution for Savings.
- 1944 -- Sea Cliff Inn Inc. bought the property.
- 1956 -- Robert W. Lloyd.
- 1957 -- Put in name of New Sea Cliff Inn Inc.
- 1965 -- to date -- Sherburne Associates.

(Abstract, Registry Deeds, Nantucket)

2. Date of erection: 1886. Argument Settlers by Turner, 1966, states that the Sea Cliff Hotel was erected in 1886 for Mrs. C. W. Pettee, and a photograph published in 1888 shows the hotel well completed and apparently in operation. In 1886 Charles H. Robinson bought the land with the dwelling-house of Obed G. Coffin thereon, and contracted with Mrs. Pettee to remove the house and build a hotel for her on the property, the final deed going to her in 1891 and reading, "whereon now stands the so-called Sea Cliff Inn". (Abstract, Records, Registry Deeds, Nantucket, Massachusetts)
 3. Architect: Charles H. Robinson was a contractor who designed the many buildings erected by him during this period.
 4. Original plans, construction, etc.: Built in the popular architectural style of the turn of the century with fancy trim and many angles. A sunporch connects two parts of the Inn with a passageway beneath leading to the path down the hill to the bathing beach road.
 5. Notes on alterations and additions: A large extension was added at the back of the west side of the Inn in 1893. (Abstract: Argument Settlers by Turner, 1966)
- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: Cliff Road was called North Street when the streets of the town were named in 1797. However, in October, 1894 North Street was changed to Cliff Road, partly perhaps because of the name of the new hotel.

The property where the Hotel was built had for many years been the homestead of Obed G. Coffin, mariner. As he was born in 1808, advanced age may have caused him to sell his home to R. Gardner Chase. Mr. Chase was contemplating building a large house and stable there, but sold it after a few years and

purchased property a short distance to the west where in 1889 he started the foundation of his house and built an elaborate stone stable on the part of his land extending down the bank onto the present bathing beach road. This stable was known for years as "The Stone Barn" and has now been converted into "The Stone Barn Inn".

In 1890 horse cars were introduced to Nantucket, with one line running from Main Street to the Sea Cliff Inn. The project was a financial failure and was abandoned after two seasons.

Charles H. Robinson was a Nantucket man, born in 1829, who made many investments in land through a period of years, selling off lots and contracting to build on them, as was the case with the Sea Cliff Inn. He and Dr. Franklin A. Ellis, local physician, in 1873 bought a tract of land in Siasconset, and although it did not result in a boom, it had a lot to do with the actual development of "Sconset and the famous Actors' Colony there.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: 1888 photograph in Nantucket Illustrated, A. Witteman, New York: The Albertype Co., 1888; two photographs, front and rear in Nantucket: Old and New by Henry Sherman Wyer, Nantucket: H. S. Wyer, 1895; two photographs in Fifty Glimpses of Nantucket by John F. Murphy, Chicago and New York: Rand McNally, 1897.

2. Bibliography:

Turner, Harry Baker. Argument Settlers. A Complete History of Nantucket in Condensed Form. Nantucket: The Inquirer and Mirror Press, 1966.

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin
Nantucket, Massachusetts
August, 1969

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Good example of late nineteenth century resort hotel building for summer visitors to Nantucket; wood frame, shingle covering, complex gable and hip roof shape, dormers and brick chimneys, situated on a cliff overlooking Nantucket Sound.
2. Condition of fabric: Poor, scheduled for demolition 1969-70, due to condition of fabric, mechanical equipment and economic infeasibility.

B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 190' by 140' (approximately).
2. Foundations: Brick and stone, brick bearing walls and piers.
3. Wall construction: Wood frame, weathered wood shingles straight, staggered and pattern; white trim.
4. Structural system: Inaccessible at time of survey; apparently post and lintel, some use of tensile iron and wood trusses.
5. Chimneys: Brick, with corbelled inverted pyramid and tapered caps.
6. Porches, stoops, etc.: Entrance loggias at Cliff Road entrances, veranda at the northwest side of the dining-room, roof surfaces appear to have been designed for occupancy.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Miscellaneous: Late nineteenth century, early twentieth century doors.
 - b. Windows: Single hung, two-over-two, some sash with large central pane with surrounds of small panes, variety of bay and bow windows; decorative sash in south elevations in hyphen walkway between two major elements (see interior description).
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape and covering: Gable, gambrel, and hip roof complicated by irregular plan; wood and sheet metal gutters and downspouts; asphalt shingles and sheet metal.
 - b. Dormers: Shed, hip and gable dormers, variety of sash; cupola at north roof of west unit formerly used as watch tower.
 - c. Skylight over kitchen, lighted by single hung, two-over-two windows; gable roof.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans: Generally a complex of two major units, of three and five floors; the east unit houses the foyer, lobby, office, dining room and kitchen with former barber shop, smoking room and services including laundry, "zoo" or helps' dining room, storage, etc. in the basement;

guest rooms in the second through fifth floors; hyphen or midway connecting two units; west unit formerly housed billiard room, services and amusement hall; diningroom and guest room on the first floor, guest rooms in second and third floors.

- a. Foyer, lobby and office: Access from piazza, bell captain's station, stairway to upper floors, lobby defined by bow window and columns, desk, switchboard and office spaces, service stair to basement.
- b. Diningroom: Accessible from lobby, kitchen and veranda to the west; large glazed sash in opening to the veranda and to north and east, two pairs glazed doors to veranda; changes in flooring and walls suggest sequence of additions.
- c. Kitchen: Multiple food preparation, storage and serving areas, employees diningroom, dumbwaiter to basement; stairway to basement and upper floors; gas-fired ranges and ovens.
- d. Hyphen in "Midway": Circulation element between east and west units, used as lounge; large openings each side glazed with clear and stained glass, some pressed glass ("Crystalline", manufactured in Virginia).
- e. Former diningroom now used as lounge, vestibule to south porch and hallway serving guest rooms, stairway to upper floor and to basement.
- f. Guest suites of one and two rooms, some with private porches or bay windows, private baths; single rooms with shared bath.
- g. Amusement hall: Large space with stage at east end, ceiling beams with tie rods continuous to roof structure at second floor; ventilating flues at east walls extend to above roof level into hooded vents.

2. Stairways:

- a. Stairway, east unit: Wood, scissor stair of four landings; square newels, carved in Gothic revival trim, turned finials; square balusters, two per tread with quarter-inch inserts; molded handrail; car siding wainscot, scalloped and molded cap; seat at side of bottom landing.
- b. Stairway, west unit: "T" shaped and scissor stairway; wood construction, carved square newels with turned finials, square baluster one per tread, pierced panel between balusters.

3. Flooring: Wood strips and boards.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster, wood strips painted white; wainscot of vertical car siding, scallop trim, molded caps; panel walls in bar.
5. Doorways and doors: Variety of two to six panel doors, one and two per opening, some panels inscribed with line-and-dot pattern.
6. Decorative features and trim: Limited to stairway, wainscot, fireplace trim; bracketed columns in diningroom.
7. Lighting: Electric.
8. Heating: Gas-fired boiler, tubular hot water radiators; fireplace in diningroom has Gothic revival trim of wood; fireplace in other rooms of brick and terra cotta in classic and Gothic motifs.

D. Site and Surroundings:

The Sea Cliff Inn is on the south side of Cliff Road overlooking Nantucket Sound, west of Nantucket Center; drive from Cliff Road under hyphen formerly extended to the beach; service drive to the east.

Prepared by F. Blair Reeves, A.I.A.
Nantucket, Massachusetts
September 5, 1969

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey project on Nantucket, Massachusetts. They are part of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Architectural description was prepared by F. Blair Reeves, A.I.A. (University of Florida). Photographs are by Jack E. Boucher of Linwood, New Jersey. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, August 1971.